Determinants of Instructional Resource Scarcity in Zambian Primary Education: A Case Study of Kalumbila District

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Abstract

This study investigates the systemic factors contributing to the shortage of teaching and learning resources in Zambian primary schools. Using a mixed-methods descriptive survey design, data was elicited from 68 stakeholders, including District Education Officers, headteachers, and teachers within the Kalumbila District. The findings indicate that while student enrollment has surged due to “Education for All” initiatives, the provision of physical, human, and instructional resources has remained stagnant. Results highlight a critical deficit in textbooks and specialized laboratories, driven by inadequate government funding and high pupil-teacher ratios. The study recommends a multifaceted approach involving enhanced fiscal allocation, strategic public-private partnerships, and community-based resource mobilization.

1. Introduction

The provision of quality education is inextricably linked to the availability of instructional materials and physical infrastructure. In the Zambian context, the transition toward universal primary education has led to significant gains in enrollment; however, this expansion has not been matched by a commensurate investment in educational inputs. As noted by Wolfeson (2000), education remains the most powerful instrument for reducing poverty and inequality, yet its efficacy is undermined when basic pedagogical tools are absent. This research explores the gap between policy intent and classroom reality in the Kalumbila District.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in the *Systems Theory of Education,* specifically the input-output model. As proposed by Coombs (1970), an educational system functions through the transformation of inputs (teachers, books, facilities) into outputs (student achievement and behavioural change).

Furthermore, the research integrates the administrative perspectives of Hoy and Miskel (2008), who argue that the school is a social system where the scarcity of physical resources directly affects the motivation and performance of the human resources (teachers and students).

3. Methodology

A descriptive research design was adopted to capture the depth of the resource crisis. The sample size (N=68) was purposively selected to include key administrative and pedagogical decision-makers. Data collection instruments included semi-structured interview guides and structured questionnaires. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), while qualitative responses underwent thematic content analysis to identify recurring barriers to resource acquisition.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. The Crisis of Classroom Congestion

A primary finding was the overwhelming Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR). Following the push for universal enrollment, some schools reported ratios as high as 86:1. This confirms the concerns of Eshiwani (1984), who noted that over-enrollment without infrastructure expansion leads to “educational dilution.”

4.2. Inadequacy of Instructional Media

There is a chronic shortage of textbooks and reference materials. Savoury (1958) and Johansson (2006) emphasize that visual aids and textbooks are the “silent teachers” in a classroom. Without these, the learning process becomes overly abstract. The study observed that most schools in the Kalumbila district lack functional libraries and laboratories, forcing teachers to rely solely on rote dictation.

4.3. Financial and Administrative Bottlenecks

The shortage is largely attributed to the "funding gap"—the discrepancy between the allocated budget and the actual disbursements received by schools. As **Haki Elimu (2008)** suggests, quality education is often sacrificed for "quantity," where the focus is on putting children in seats regardless of whether they have the tools to learn.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the shortage of resources in Zambian schools is not merely a logistical failure but a systemic financial crisis. To address these challenges, the following actions are recommended:

a) **Decentralized Resource Management:** The Ministry of General Education should grant schools more autonomy in local resource mobilization.

b) **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Leveraging the presence of mining companies in Kalumbila to establish sustainable school-industry partnerships, as suggested by **Triyoga (2010)** regarding community involvement.

c) **Infrastructure Prioritization:** Shift focus from mere enrollment numbers to the quality of the learning environment by rehabilitating dilapidated classrooms and laboratories.

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